ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT

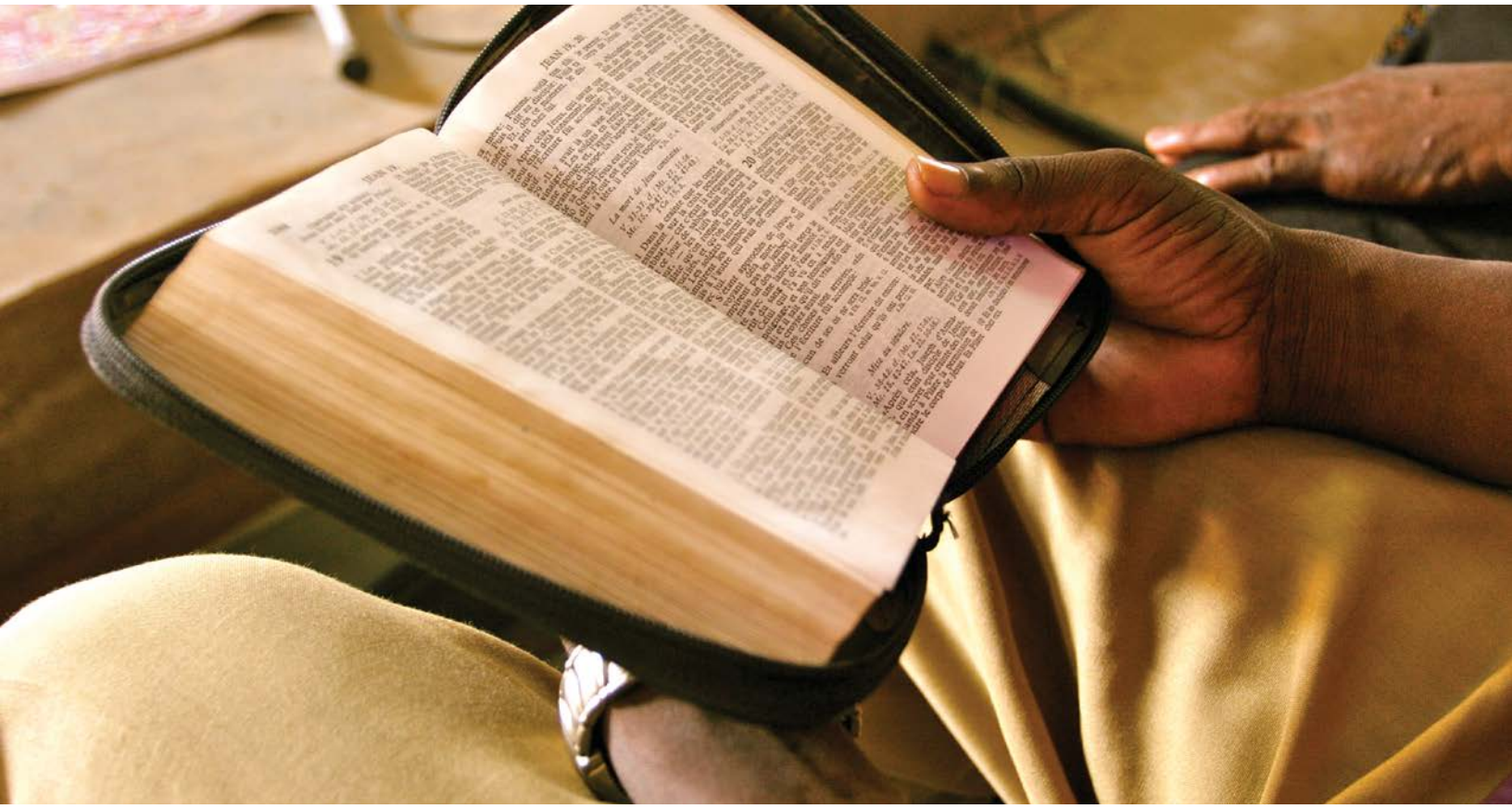
MARGARET HOLTRUST: THE HEART & HANDS OF A SERVANT

by Michelle Eaton

> *And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*
> LUKE 10:27 (ESV)

Wife, mother, educator, missionary and philanthropist. The late Margaret Holtrust may not be a well-known name among the students who currently fill the classrooms, corridors and library carrels of Trinity Law School, but countless numbers of those on campus and beyond have benefitted from her life and legacy.

Holtrust was born in Holland in 1925 and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was three. Her Dutch parents were farmers who settled in the state of Washington and ran a small dairy farm. She learned how to overcome difficult circumstances at a young age. Her father drowned when she was 12, leaving her to help raise her younger brother and sister while her mother went to work cleaning houses.



Wycliffe Bible Translators

After graduating from high school, Margaret attended college in San Francisco for a short time where she took nursing courses. World War II was underway, and she answered the call to join the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps. During her time with the Nurse Corps, Margaret was introduced to a young sailor named John who shared her last name – Holtrust. It wasn't long before Margaret and John were married. When the war was over, they moved to Los Angeles to start a family.

Margaret became a Christian in her early twenties. She was listening to a sermon by popular minister J. Vernon McGee one day while driving and became convicted of the truth of Christianity. She pulled her car to the side of the road, placed her hand on the radio, and accepted Jesus Christ as her savior.

God, family, Christian service and traditional values grounded her life.

"My parents were part of the generation that lived through the Great Depression," according to her son, John Holtrust. "They were just regular folks."

"My father was a milkman and my mother found part-time jobs, like packing dates when they were in season," said daughter, MarJeanne Iorio. When she decided she needed to send her children to private Christian schools, Margaret began working as a cook at a high school cafeteria to pay for the tuition.

But in spite of the hard work, achieving the American dream remained elusive for the couple and their four children. So, in the mid-1960s, still pursuing their dreams, they decided to move to Sydney, Australia. The nation was beckoning immigrants with the promise of a sea passage. The open invitation was part of a national effort to entice people to move Down Under to help meet labor shortages and develop the country economically.

According to MarJeanne, her mother and father wanted to "break out of their rut and experience the world."

John's recollection of the decision was similar:

"My parents went through a process where they made the decision that they really needed to change the trajectory of their lives – change the way things were headed for all of us."

To this end, the family sold everything, boarded a steamship, and embarked on what they hoped would be a great adventure. As

John recalled, the 8,000-mile journey represented more than merely traveling between two points on a map. The trip helped illuminate for him the kind of people his parents were: ones who cared deeply about their neighbors near and far.

"We went to Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines on our way to Australia. When we got to each port, missionaries my parents had been helping support met us at the ship. My parents were just working-class people. But everywhere we stopped people took us under their wings and invited us into their homes. My parents had relationships in each of these places. It was surreal for me as a 12-year-old kid."

"My parents had a heart for others, agreed MarJeanne. They wanted everyone to know Christ, and also wanted to meet the day-to-day needs of people."

As for Australia?

"It was a fantastic experience, but we could not stay," explained MarJeanne.

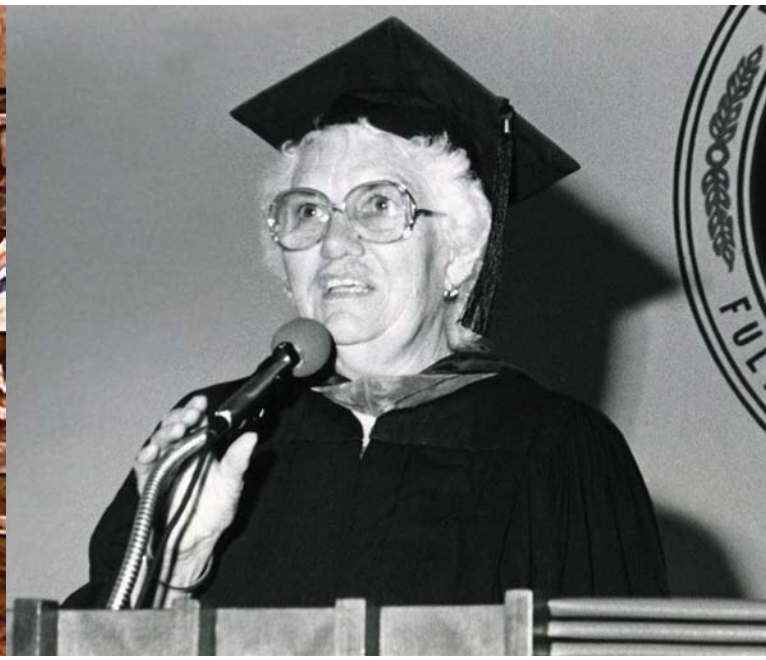
The Holtrust family returned to the U.S. a year later because they discovered getting ahead financially was no easier in Australia than in Southern California. In addition, the educational system was too different and family support was far away. But they were resolute in their commitment to acquire the tools needed for a better life.

"My parents decided my mother should finish college" said John. "She ultimately earned a master's degree in political science. And suddenly instead of a working-class perspective, my sisters and I realized the value of education and we went to school too."

Margaret began teaching at Golden West Community College. While there she invented ways to engage her students in the political process. She required them work together in groups to solve real-life issues. For some, this meant figuring out how to get a stop sign installed at a busy intersection. For others, it was discovering how to lobby for more community development funds. As a result, her students learned by doing.

"My mother really believed in the need to achieve tangible results, to get some work done, for her, learning wasn't just a mental exercise. You don't just leave with the books read, the syllabus finished, and the tests taken. She was really seeking to inspire people to action. And that was her life too. The things that she felt strongly about, she got committed to and made happen, explained John."

When her husband died in the late 1980s, Margaret decided to stop teaching and start doing missionary work. She spent the next dozen years as a freelance writer for Wycliffe Bible Translators, and traveled to remote parts of the world to cover



stories. She traveled to places like Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"My mother had great compassion for Africa." shared MarJeanne.

During this time, Margaret continued her long-time involvement with the Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, which led to her being elected to the Board of Trustees for Trinity International University.

It was not long before, Margaret became fond of the law school. She soon began focusing on ways to attend to the needs of the growing law school in California.

"I noticed her interest shift." recalled John. "She felt like she had made a contribution as a university trustee. But since most of her life was spent operating much closer to the action, this was where her heart was. I think she saw a real opportunity to help the law school. So that is what she did."

Margaret became a familiar face on the California campus and a consistent donor.

"She had great affection for the law school." shared Trinity Law School dean Myron S. Steeves. "She would drop by and see us when she could. And she gave regularly."

Most of her gifts were unrestricted and could be used to meet any needs on campus. But some were intended strictly to upgrade the library.

She was also a strong advocate of the human rights program at Trinity Law School.

"My mom really had a strong sense of justice and fairness." said John. "She had traveled internationally. And if you have spent any time in the developing world, you know the problems have layers upon layers of complexity. She felt that it was important to do something tangible, particularly as Christians."

Margaret recognized the need for training future attorneys in the area of human rights law. She understood the importance of educating students about the exploitation and abuses of people around the world, and instructing them how to seek justice on behalf of these victims by engaging the legal process.

"She knew there had to be processes, structures, and institutions established if you wanted something to last beyond the instant," shared John.

And Margaret was a woman of action.

"Where her heart was, not only was her purse, but also a high degree of personal involvement and personal caring." said John.

Her generosity had an important ripple effect.

"Margaret really helped the law school by persuading others to support its mission financially," said McConnell.

For her son, this enthusiasm was contagious.

"Talking with my mom helped me understand where Trinity was going, and the vision for the law school. Suddenly, I wanted to help, too."

(L to R) MarJeanne Iorio, Margaret Holtrust, John Michael Holtrust, Judi (Judith) Marie Tull, Janice Maureen Mann

John soon provided the funds to update the critical computer networking infrastructure at Trinity.

A standing lunch date between John and his mother soon inspired a project of an even grander scale: an international gathering of Christian thinkers and educators who would be invited to discuss the intersection of faith and politics.

"Together and with our Christian friends we were wrestling with questions like, 'What is the place of God in the public square?'" recalled John.

They decided there was room for some intellectual dialogue and debate about this ancient and fundamental inquiry that seemed to be missing from the experience of many people.

"So what came out of that was a real proposal on my part." shared John. "I went to Trinity and said, 'What would it take in terms of a donation to really do this?'"

A budget was assembled, John wrote a large check, and the "God & Governing" conference was born.

The two-day event unfolded in February 2008.

"I was very impressed with the quality of what Trinity Law School was able to do in terms of booking high-caliber, widely-recognized speakers." said John. "There was interest from all over the world. We even had people come all the way from Indonesia to attend. It was fantastic."

Both mother and son are credited for its success.

"John provided Trinity with a major grant for the conference, but Margaret pointed the way." noted McConnell.

The reason?

"Again, my mother had a real heart for education, she believed in it. With the life model that she had, she knew education could be transformative."

As McConnell related with fondness, Margaret also demonstrated her spirit of giving and innate kindness in other ways.

"I will never forget how Margaret used to bring poinsettias to decorate the law school every Christmas season, and fruit from her own citrus trees to cheer the staff. I remember one of Margaret's large fragrant navel oranges sitting on (former) Dean Kevin

"Together and with our Christian friends we were wrestling with questions like, *'What is the place of God in the public square?'*"

Holsclaw's desk. He would palm the orange from hand to hand as we discussed the issues of law school administration."

Margaret fully embraced the Biblical commandment to "love thy neighbor," and lived it every day.

"She was warm and friendly to everyone," recalled McConnell. "Despite the aches and pains of age, she had an adventurous spirit and would take every opportunity to come and visit us or call to see how things were going. She was a great prayer warrior as well, and upheld not only the law school, but her church and missionary work as well."

When Margaret died, her family discovered she had willed ten percent of her estate to the determined Christian law school that had captured her heart.

"I wasn't surprised. She made decisions that were in alignment with what her life values were. She had a lot of passion for the things that she was involved in, including Trinity Law School."

The generous financial support Margaret and her son have provided over the years earned them the distinction of being the top donors in the history of the law school.

As MarJeanne shared, a treasured final moment in the life of their mother depicted her spirit of true humility and the selfless devotion she had for God and His people.

My mother loved music. And even though she could not carry a tune, she did make a joyful noise. She would hear her favorite worship songs and lift her arms in praise. When I went to see her in the hospital after her stroke, she was still somewhat alert. And there she was, raising her right arm making a joyful noise. She was ready to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ and praise Him. She met Him on Mother's Day in 2011.

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